

July 8, 2009

Coastal Conservation Association of Virginia

Virginia Recreational Fishing Advisory Board
C/O Jack Travelstead
Virginia Marine Resources Commission
2600 Washington Avenue
Newport News, VA 23607

Dear RFAB Members:

Our Fisheries Management Committee has reviewed the proposals submitted for the 2009 and 2010 cycles and has developed the individual positions noted below. We again ranked the proposals (for each year) in order of their relative importance and ability to address the original intent of the fund in light of the raid to siphon off the assets to cover shortfalls in the state budget.

It is unfortunate that the conscientious deliberations of the RFAB concerning these requests seem, at this point, to be a meaningless drill, with little ability to support a host of projects vital to the angling community for which the fund is intended to support. In addition to paying those taxes assessed to the general public, the anglers of Virginia are now being "taxed" a second time to compensate for shortfalls in the state's general fund. This is a gross misrepresentation of the purpose for which the license fund was established. While this might be "legal" and somewhat justifiable in the context of a one-time "emergency", the VMRC and the anglers of the commonwealth should vehemently oppose any continuance of this onerous practice.

Against the background of this situation, the recommendations and prioritizations below may only be an "academic exercise". However, in the event a limited amount of funding is available, it is hoped that our list of prioritized projects (listed separately for 2009 and 2010) will assist in steering funds to those projects most critical / pertinent to those that have contributed to the fund – namely, the angling public. It should be noted our prioritized lists of the past two cycles generally placed children's fishing clinics in the middle of our "support" lists. However, these projects were elevated to the top of the current listings due to our feeling that their minimal costs should be seen as at least the bare minimum the fund should seek to honor. Failure to do so would truly send the worst message possible – that the future of recreational fishing is not deemed important to the commonwealth.

2009 Project Prioritization: (both new [P and Q] and those up for renewal [A thru J]):

SUPPORT.

1. (A) 2009 Sunshine Children's Fishing Program
(B) 2009 Saxis Fishing Pier Youth Fishing Tournament
2. (D) 2009 Youth Developmental "Hooked on Fishing" Adventure

- (C) 2009 Hope House & Oak Grove Nursing Home Fishing Excursions and Clinics
- 3. (F) 2009 Deployment of Artificial Reef Structure
- 4. (G) 2009 Estimate and Assess Social and Economic Importance and Value of Menhaden to Chesapeake Bay Stakeholders and Region
- 5. (H) 2009 Enhancing Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV) Habitat: --
- 6. (E) 2009 Virginia Marine Sportfish Collection
- 7. (Q) 2009 Trophic Position & Ecological Function of Juvenile Menhaden --

DO NOT SUPPORT.

- 8. (I) Federal Assistance (Wallop-Breaux) Matching Funds, Federal FY 2010
- 9. (J) Estimating Relative Abundance of Young-of-Year American Eel --
- 10.(P) 2009 Virginia Fishing Line Recycling Program

2010 Project Prioritization: (both new [R thru U] and those up for renewal [K thru O]):

SUPPORT.

- 1. (K) 2010 Children's Fishing Clinic -- NN Rotary Club & CCA-Peninsula
- (L) 2010 Kiwanis Club Children's Fishing Clinic
- (R) 2010 Academic Anglers Children's Fishing Clinic
- 2. (M) 2010 Virginia Game Fish Tagging
- 3. (U) 2010 Blueline and Golden Tilefish Population Dynamics --
- 4. (N) 2010 Improving Stock Assessment of Weakfish
- 5. (S) 2010 Understanding the Impacts of Mycobacterial Disease on Striped Bass: When and Where does Mortality Occur in the Rappahannock --
- 6. (T) 2010 Connecting Productivity in Eelgrass Beds to Recreationally Important Finfishes --

DO NOT SUPPORT.

- 7. (O) Jan-Dec 2010, Estimating Relative Abundance of Young-of-Year American Eel --

Individual Project Comments:

Multi-Year Projects for 2009 Renewal:

A. 2009 Sunshine Children's Fishing Program. Portsmouth Anglers Club. \$7,194.

SUPPORT. We continue to maintain our staunch support of these important youth events. Proportionately, they provide perhaps the greatest long-term dividends when measured against the relatively modest outlay of funds. They not only expose an ever-growing number of young people to the joy and conservation ethic of sport fishing, but also provide a vehicle with which large numbers of volunteers impart a positive impression on the next generation of Virginians dedicated to the protection of our coastal resources.

B. Saxis Fishing Pier Youth Fishing Tournament (Year 8). Eastern Shore of VA Anglers Club. \$1,325. **SUPPORT.** See rationale in (A) above.

C. 2009 Hope House & Oak Grove Nursing Home Fishing Excursions and Clinics. Great Bridge Fisherman's Association. \$4,000. **SUPPORT.** These outings directed towards seniors in our community provide many of the same benefits as the youth events, and as such, should be supported by the fund. As we noted in our comments from the previous year, if the \$1800 requested for the T-shirts is deemed appropriate, the board should ensure the petitioners prominently display the fund as the primary sponsor of the event. Otherwise, the cost should be shared with any contributing sponsors.

D. 2009 Youth Developmental "Hooked on Fishing" Adventure (Year 2). A. Fisher, R. Lockhart, Virginia Charter Boat Association. \$5,780. **SUPPORT.** While yet another commendable youth event that we encourage the fund to support, we "prioritized it slightly behind (A) and (B) above in that it supports a smaller number of children than that served by more traditional shore bound programs.

E. 2009 Virginia Marine Sportfish Collection (Year 3). J. Grist, J. Cimino, VMRC. \$10,000. **SUPPORT.** During the last two years, we have supported this modestly priced endeavor in the hope it would significantly augment the database on several species that are of growing interest/concern to the local recreational community. Several of the collected species represent important niche recreational fisheries which will benefit from the additional data necessary for the maintenance of sustainable populations which will hopefully contain ample numbers of trophy sized individuals. During the previous cycle's request we specifically noted: *"Recent reports on tilefish and snowy grouper sizes and ages are indicative of the value of this type of targeted research."* However, it is disturbing that the staff, supposedly due to funding limitations, has chosen to delete tilefish, grouper, and spadefish from the collection program. While it could be argued that the proposed ODU tilefish study (see item U) might reduce the necessity for its inclusion here, the overall status of the fund puts the tilefish study in peril. Furthermore, it is difficult to understand why spadefish, which plays such a large and unique role in Virginia would be dropped. We would strongly recommend they continue to be included in the study, even at the risk of deleting another species such as king mackerel, which has to date been a species specifically targeted by very few in the state.

F. 2009 Deployment of Artificial Reef Structure. Mike Meier, VMRC. \$100,000. **SUPPORT.** Our support for this long, on-going program has been consistent and enthusiastic. The reason is simple -- no other effort more clearly targets the intent of this fund to directly address the needs of the state's recreational anglers. Consequently, in this era of funding limitations, we have placed it near the top of the our priority list and hope the board and commission take the necessary steps to ensure it remains on the "must have" list of critical projects.

G. 2009 Estimate and Assess Social and Economic Importance and Value of Menhaden to Chesapeake Bay Stakeholders and Region (3 Year Study) - Year 3. James Kirkley, VIMS. \$154,452. **SUPPORT.** Our previous support during the past

two years of this important study reflects a ground swell of public support for the necessity of maintaining this vital filter feeder/forage resource. It is hoped this final year of the study will provide data critical to the ultimate preservation of this keystone in the bay's overall ecosystem. Our comments in reference to the initial request still reflect our opinions/concerns: *"we are keenly interested in and wholeheartedly support an unbiased fact-based study on this topic. We encourage Dr. Kirkley to examine the potential impacts on all stakeholders, including the benefits from the harvest of the species. We agree with the petitioner's assertion that studies such as this are important to the process of transitioning from a species by species management scheme to an ecosystem management scheme. While there might be some that would object to using recreational license money to fund this study, we feel it is in the best interest of the recreational angling community to support funding of this project because menhaden are a primary forage species for many species recreational anglers target. Furthermore, we agree with the VMRC staff recommendation for sharing the cost between the commercial and recreational funds."*

H. 2009 Enhancing Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV) Habitat: Research and Education for Restoration (Year 15). Robert Orth, VIMS. \$98,309 modified on 5/8/09 to \$48,309. **SUPPORT.** We continue with our endorsement of this long running project in the hope that it will be successful in restoring this vital coastal environment. Our comments from prior cycles still echo our view regarding funding considerations – *"while we would hope that some degree of federal funding would be forth coming for the program's sustainment, we would still advocate funding by the board."* Furthermore, *"we continue to feel the commercial sector should bear an equal cost in this and other SAV projects. However, even if commercial funding would arise, those commercial activities deemed 'detrimental' (haul seining, with associated prop scarring or any type of dredging) to this habitat should be prohibited. The lack of such safeguards would not only jeopardize the health of this habitat, but would also curtail any future support for using recreational monies in this regard."*

I. Federal Assistance (Wallop-Breaux) Matching Funds, Federal FY 2010. Jack Travelstead, VMRC. \$235,563. **DO NOT SUPPORT.** Our continued lack of support of this request is consistent with our concerns the previous four times the RFAB was approached to provide what we considered to be an undue level/source of funding for this program. However, unlike some previous cycles, in which the commercial fund was also tabbed (although proportionately at a much lower level), there will be no commercial match. Such funding inequity only exacerbates the situation in which the recreational sector is expected to carry the load in order to preserve federal assistance to the program. Consequently, the comments regarding prior cycles still reflect our frustration regarding the issue: *"any future requests for WB offset should be financed entirely from the commercial fund, given the rationale that the WB federal portion is itself derived indirectly from the recreational sector"*, and *"that it is important the RFAB stands firm in demanding 100% of matching funding be derived from the commercial industry in all subsequent funding cycles"*. All this is especially frustrating in that when the fund is at it's historical low point, the state finds itself in the situation of raiding the license fund to preserve its receipt of

federal monies in order to maintain funding critical of efforts to manage our finfish resources.

J. Jun - Dec 2009, Estimating Relative Abundance of Young-of-Year American Eel in the Virginia Tributaries of Chesapeake Bay. M. Fabrizio, T. Tuckey, VIMS. \$24,544.

DO NOT SUPPORT. Recent input from the VMRC staff indicates that their recommendation provided to the June 23 Commission meeting will be to use commercial funds for this project. If this is the case, the following comments may be disregarded. However, if the commercial fund is not used to fund it, then our comments should be considered.We have consistently opposed use of recreational monies to fund this project and some of our comments from last year still reflect this posture. “...our objections to this project were based primarily on its limited benefit to the recreational angling community. Consequently, we felt funding for this and other related projects on eel research should be sought from the commercial fund. Previous arguments that eels are of growing significance as the bait of choice for species such as striped bass and cobia do not constitute sufficient rationale for use of our shrinking recreational license dollars.”

Multi-Year Projects for 2010 Renewal:

K. 2010 Children's Fishing Clinic (Year 13). Rob Cowling, Newport News Rotary Club and Coastal Conservation Association-Peninsula. \$6,500. **SUPPORT.** The rationale in (A) above applies to this pacesetter of all subsequent such clinics.

L. 2010 Kiwanis Club Children's Fishing Clinic (Year 9). Wesley Brown, Capital District Kiwanis Club. \$6,500. **SUPPORT.** See rationale in (A) above.

M. 2010 Virginia Game Fish Tagging (Year 16). J. Lucy, VIMS and L. Gillingham, VMRC. \$87,800. **SUPPORT.** This is an outstanding program that has provided a long trail of valuable data at relatively modest expense. Consequently, the program was at the top of our previous prioritization list. Our comments from the three previous years continue to echo our thoughts: “we remain committed to supporting this valuable, long-standing program. By continuing to provide critical data on virtually every recreationally significant species, it has been extremely important in the successful management of our saltwater fishery. As we have noted previously, the program not only contributes valuable finfish data for scientific and management communities, but also attracts an expanding cadre of volunteer taggers who have helped expand the conservation ethic through their efforts”.

N. 2010 Improving Stock Assessment of Weakfish - Year 3. Y. Jiao, D. Orth, VPI& SU, and R. O'Reilly, VMRC. \$111,356. **SUPPORT.** While our position on this project has migrated from “minimal support” to “support”, it is prioritized somewhere in the middle relative to other projects. Although we did acknowledge the project’s approach and methodology appeared to be headed in the right direction to hopefully shed light on the dire straight of this species along the Atlantic coast, we continue to maintain that a portion of the funding for the project should come from the ASMFC, given that the species is present throughout the coast. An additional past

comment remains relevant: *"If this support (ASMFC) is not forthcoming, at least a portion of any local funding should be derived from the commercial sector in that this species has been a major target of their activities"*.

O. Jan-Dec 2010, Estimating Relative Abundance of Young-of-Year American Eel in the Virginia Tributaries of Chesapeake Bay (Yr 9). M. Fabrizio, T. Tuckey, VIMS. \$46,574. **DO NOT SUPPORT.** The rationale noted for item (J) above applies to this project as well. Even if the commercial fund is used to successfully fund **item (J)**, we disagree with any plan to share the funding for the 2010 portion of the project.

New Projects for 2009:

P. 2009 Virginia Fishing Line Recycling Program. A. Nelson, J. Grist, VMRC. \$3,500. **DO NOT SUPPORT.** On the surface, this would appear to be a logical "motherhood-and-apple pie" program worthy of support, especially in light of its modest cost. However, given that there are already numerous such efforts/collection points in existence, it would seem the funds, if truly available, could be diverted to more pressing programs.

Q. 2009 Trophic Position and Ecological Function of Juvenile Menhaden in Chesapeake Bay. C. Jones, J. Schaffler, ODURF. \$43,967. **SUPPORT.** While we support and acknowledge the value of this project, funding for it must be weighed against the others seeking support from the fund. For example, completing year 3 of item (G) above should take precedence at this juncture.

New Projects for 2010:

R. 2010 Academic Anglers Children's Fishing Clinic. C. Roberts, A. Bracey, Academic Anglers Fishing Team. \$1,000. **SUPPORT.** See rationale in (A) above.

S. 2010 Understanding the Impacts of Mycobacterial Disease on Striped Bass: When and Where does Mortality Occur in the Rappahannock River. J. Hoenig, W. Vogelbein, VIMS. \$50,535. **SUPPORT.** While we support this project in its effort to fill in another piece of a persistent problem in our most important finfish species, its support from the fund does not appear possible at this time, especially when viewed in light of other high priority projects. However, if there is an indication that a significant portion of the funding could be derived from the commercial fund, as it should be, then the RFAB may deem the remaining cost as worthy of support.

T. 2010 Connecting Productivity in Eelgrass Beds to Recreationally Important Finfishes in Chesapeake Bay: Forage Fishes as Trophic Conduits. R. Latour, K. Sobocinski, J. van Montfrans, J. E. Duffy, VIMS. \$58,329. **SUPPORT.** Again, this is a project that can add to that of many others in confirming the value of this critical environment. Still, the reality of the current funding crisis would seem to relegate this request to the bottom of those 2010 projects appropriate for assistance from the fund.

U. 2010 Blueline and Golden Tilefish Population Dynamics Along the Virginian Continental Shelf, Year 1. J. Ballenger, C. Jones, ODURF. \$72,768. **SUPPORT.**

We feel this proposal should take precedence over all others in 2010 that are focused on single species research. The explosion in offshore, deep-drop fishing for tilefish has been a unique and exciting growth segment in the recreational fishery. However, serious concerns have also been raised regarding the need for proper management of the species in order to ensure their continued abundance. This study will be a vital first step in providing data resource managers can use to effectively manage the species.

As in the past, we appreciate the opportunity to express our views on the allocation of our state's license funds. Thank you for your consideration.

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CCA of Virginia